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) Restoring Internet Freedom) WC Docket No. 17-108

Written Ex Parte of the Benton Foundation

The Benton Foundation offers the following for the newly-opened WC Docket No. 17-108.

San Jose Mercury News reporter Troy Wolverton interviewed Dane Jasper, the co-founder of Sonic, the Santa Rosa-based company that's tried to establish itself as the consumer-friendlier local alternative to Comcast and AT&T. Arguing for net neutrality rules, Jasper notes, "In today's environment ... where consumers have, in many cases, only one choice at greater than 25 megabits, what we see is rent-seeking behaviors and abuses of the consumer, whether it's bad customer service or expensive pricing or network neutrality concerns."

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Asked if Sonic's ability to innovate had been curtailed by Title II-based net neutrality rules, Jasper said, "No. And we certainly supported former FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler in his efforts to protect network neutrality. And that didn't hamper our investment or our concerns about our future ability to monetize the networks that we build."

Sincerely,

_____/s/

Kevin Taglang

Benton Foundation

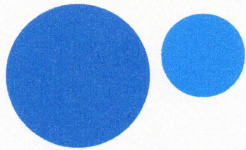
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Business

Sonic CEO talks expansion, broadband policy Local broadband provider carving out niche by trying to be consumer friendly



Dane Jasper, CEO of Sonic, at the company's data center in Santa Rosa, Calif. (Kristopher Skinner/Bay Area News Group)

By **TROY WOLVERTON** | twolverton@bayareanewsgroup.com |
PUBLISHED: April 27, 2017 at 6:00 am | UPDATED: April 27, 2017 at 6:06 am

Dane Jasper may run a broadband provider, but he wants you to know that his company is on your side.

Jasper is the co-founder of Sonic, the Santa Rosa-based company that's tried to establish itself as the consumer-friendlier local alternative to Comcast and AT&T. Sonic promises to protect its own customers' privacy. And Jasper publicly supported the Federal Communications Commission's controversial moves to re-regulate internet access and put in place [strong net neutrality](#) and [broadband privacy](#) rules, the latter of which [Congress recently overturned](#).

Sonic's policies and positions have drawn plaudits. Consumer Reports ranked it as the [second-best broadband provider](#) in the country, and the Electronic Frontier Foundation [gave it a five-star rating for protecting privacy](#). Its reputation has helped Sonic not only be one of the few remaining internet

providers to have survived since the dial-up era, but to position itself for the future as it builds out its own fiber-optic network to deliver super-fast gigabit service.

Jasper spoke with this newspaper about broadband policy in this country, including his support for net neutrality, and about his company's build-out of its fiber network. This interview had been edited for length and clarity.

Q Why do you support net neutrality and the FCC's just discarded privacy rules?

A I think it's good business to take care of your customers. Your customers will be loyal to you when you take good care of them. That might be good pricing. That might be good customer service. Or it's that you don't sell them out to advertisers or that you don't engage in practices that would violate their privacy for whatever small commercial gain that you might have.

Also, I think the ecosystem of the internet is something that needs to be preserved. As I've watched the internet blossom from the early start of my career more than 20 years ago, I am stunned by the wonderful ideas and amazing services that people have put together. And they're the reason that every day, consumers are signing up for Sonic.

It's important to preserve neutrality so we can continue to see great new ideas come to fore, even if those ideas use a ton of bandwidth, or even if those ideas require really low latency.

Q FCC Chairman Ajit Pai has criticized the net neutrality and privacy rules as being examples of “[heavy-handed regulation](#)” and regulatory “[overreach](#).” He's argued that cutting such regulations will increase competition, lower prices and get higher speeds to broadband consumers, because it will encourage innovation on the network side and will free things up so that you can get investment on the network side. What do you say to those arguments?

A One of the things Pai has said is [if you regulate broadband like it's a monopoly, you end up with a monopoly](#). That's not entirely unfair. If there is a vibrant, competitive environment with many, many choices, then I think that bad behaviors will be held in check, and innovation in business model and infrastructure and in the network won't be a bad thing.

In today's environment, though, where consumers have, in many cases, [only one choice at greater than 25 megabits](#), what we see is rent-seeking behaviors and abuses of the consumer, whether it's bad customer service or expensive pricing or network neutrality concerns.

Q Has Sonic's ability to innovate been affected by the FCC's decision under Obama to re-regulate broadband?

A No. And we certainly supported former FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler in his efforts to protect network neutrality. And that didn't hamper our investment or our concerns about our future ability to monetize the networks that we build.

Q When Wheeler pushed through the net neutrality rules, one of the things he chose not to do was to require open access — to force the Comcasts and AT&Ts of the world to allow competitors to offer broadband service over their wires, something AT&T had to do in the dial-up era. Do you think that was a mistake?

A It's unfortunate that the U.S. has not been able to maintain the sort of vibrant competitive outcome that Europe has achieved through a long-term commitment to open access. However, I don't think that even Wheeler's FCC could go that far. So, we have to be pragmatic about what can and can't be accomplished.

I think Wheeler attempted to do what was achievable. But the idea of completely undoing eight years of deregulation was not politically feasible.

Q In terms of your fiber rollout, what determines where you're going to expand next?

A There's really just two factors: One is the number of customers we have in the area that are on the existing DSL technologies. And the other is the construction cost of the area. Areas where the existing customer density is good and the construction costs are good get built first.

Q Would you avoid an area if a rival is already offering or building out gigabit service there?

A Yes is the short answer. We haven't encountered that situation in any of the areas that we've built to date, but I anticipate that we will eventually. And so that becomes a third factor for those markets.

Q How quickly do you plan to roll out fiber to new areas?

A We will wrap up the vast majority of the work in San Francisco by the end of this year, and we'll be launching services in two other Bay Area cities around the end of this year. And then each year we sort of double the pace, so it's an exponential curve. And so in 2018, assuming that the business is going well, we expect to continue to do that.

Dane Jasper

Age: 43

Birthplace: Santa Rosa

Position: CEO and co-founder, Sonic

Previous jobs: Clerk at Radio Shack; Domino's pizza delivery person

Education: Attended Santa Rosa Junior College, but did not graduate

Family: Married, with three children

Residence: Sonoma County

Other interests: Flying airplanes, beekeeping, backpacking

Five things about Dane Jasper

1. Founded Sonic when he was 21
 2. Is an instrument-rated private pilot, advanced open-water diver and former skydiver
 3. Can drive a tractor
 4. Is addicted to email
 5. Did not finish high school
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Troy Wolverton

Troy Wolverton writes the Tech Files column and covers consumer technology as the personal technology columnist for the Bay Area News Group. Previously, he covered Apple and the consumer electronics industry. Earlier, he reported on technology, business and financial issues for TheStreet.com and CNET News.com.

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